



## World celebrates biodiversity

On May 22nd the world will celebrate the International Day for Biological Diversity. This annual event aims to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity, whilst stressing the importance of its conservation.

This year's theme is "Biodiversity and Development" and seeks to emphasise the importance of biodiversity for healthy and sustainable development; bringing to attention the consequences of its loss and how this impacts on human well-being. Protecting biodiversity not only improves our environment, but benefits our health and economies. Many species have crucial uses in such diverse industries as agriculture, eco-tourism and medical research, while many others have vital roles in maintaining ecosystems and our food supplies.

This year's event is also of particular significance as 2010 has been proclaimed as the International Year of Biodiversity, a year-long celebration of the huge variety of life on Earth. Throughout the year, as part of our '[Most Wanted](#)' challenge, ARKive aims to highlight the plight of the world's threatened species by tracking down imagery for 17,000 of the most endangered animals and plants. Below is a small selection of [ARKive species](#) which play a role in improving human well-being.



### [Vicuna](#) (*Vicugna vicugna*)

Once hunted in their tens of thousands for their valuable double-coated fleece, today local communities are able to sustainably harvest the [vicuna's](#) wool, one of the most valuable and highly-prized sources of animal fibre, which may sell for \$300 to \$800 per kilogram.

### [Eastern gorilla](#) (*Gorilla beringei*)

A continent rich in wildlife, many thousands of tourists travel to Africa each year in the hope of seeing some of its iconic animals. As a result, nature-based tourism now generates approximately the same amount of revenue as farming, forestry and fisheries combined.





### [Azobe \(\*Lophira alata\*\)](#)

The Earth's forests act as a natural sink for carbon dioxide, potentially mitigating some of the effects of global warming. Tropical forests may trap as much as 18 percent of all carbon dioxide added to our atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels.

### [Yellowfin tuna \(\*Thunnus albacares\*\)](#)

Astonishingly, more than 3.5 billion people rely on the ocean as their primary source of food, with 80 percent of the world's population living within 60 miles of the coast. Consequently, protecting our fish-stocks has never been more important.



### [Honey bee \(\*Apis mellifera\*\)](#)

Honey bees perform a vital role in the pollination of flowering plants, and are estimated to pollinate around a third of the food we eat. Their role in the food chain is so important that in the UK the value of bees' services has been estimated at £200 million a year and the retail value of what they pollinate closer to a colossal £1 billion a year.

### [Madagascar periwinkle \(\*Catharanthus roseus\*\)](#)

In one of the major medical breakthroughs of the last century, scientists were able to utilise several alkaloids derived from the [Madagascar periwinkle](#) for use in cancer treatment. One particular compound (vincristine) has been credited with raising the survival rate in childhood leukaemia from less than 10 percent in 1960 to over 90 percent today.



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